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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000567

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ML](#)
SUBJECT: TUAREG REBELS SEEK UNITY AS FOOD CRISIS IN KIDAL
LOOMS

REF: A. BAMAKO 00305
[1](#)B. BAMAKO 00482
[1](#)C. BAMAKO 00507

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: A delegation of Tuaregs rebels, including Ibrahim Bahanga, Hassan Fagaga and Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) spokesman Ahmada ag Bibi, traveled to Algeria during the weekend of June 14-15 in an attempt to unify disparate Tuareg rebel movements under the banner of the Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC). Reconstituting the ADC, which signed the Algiers Accords on behalf of Tuareg rebels in July 2006, is a key step toward reviving Algerian mediated peace negotiations with the Malian government. Personal rivalries between Tuareg leaders, however, are likely to complicate attempts to convince dissident Tuareg rebels like Bahanga and Fagaga to return to the ADC. Also during the weekend of June 14-15, the Malian Red Cross completed visits to Malian soldiers held captive by Bahanga and the ADC. According to the Red Cross, Bahanga is currently holding 49 hostages. The ADC has another 26 hostages, bringing the total number of captive Malian soldiers to 75. The Red Cross reported that civilian populations displaced by fighting in northern Mali were facing serious food shortages. Government officials in Kidal also warned of an impending humanitarian crisis. End Summary.

Tuareg Rebels Seek Unity

2.(C) A delegation of Tuareg rebels traveled from Tinzwaten to Tamanrasset in southern Algeria during the weekend of June 14-15. The group is composed of individuals representing various Tuareg rebel movements and ethnic fractions and is expected to continue on to Algiers. Ibrahim Bahanga, Hassan Fagaga and Hama ag Moussa are representing the Northern Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change (ATNMC). Several Malian newspapers erroneously reported last week that Fagaga was mortally wounded during a June 3-5 skirmish with government backed paramilitary units in Tin Assalek. The Malian government claims to have killed 20 rebels during this encounter. Bahanga's father-in-law and ATNMC spokesman Hama ag Sid'Ahmed reported that Tuaregs suffered no casualties and instead killed 13 Malian soldiers. Ag Sid'Ahmed is expected to travel from Paris to Algiers to join the delegation from Kidal.

3.(C) On the ADC side are Ahmada ag Bibi, Commandant Ada ag Massamad, Kidal Chamber of Commerce President Abdousalam ag Assalat, and the National Assembly Deputy from Tessalit, Deity ag Sidamou. The Tuaregs added Eghless ag Oufene - a newly minted rebel who left his job as an accountant for a UN

sponsored development program in Kidal to lead a botched attack against the Malian garrison in Aguelhok on March 26 (Ref. A) - to the delegation list at the last minute.

4.(C) An Algerian supported meeting of Tuareg rebel leaders to select a point person capable of speaking on behalf of all Tuareg factions under the banner of the ADC has been in the works for several weeks (Refs. B and C). No one has been able to unify Tuareg rebels since ADC leader Iyad ag Ghali withdrew from northern Malian politics to assume a position at the Malian consulate in Djeddah, Saudi Arabia. Since the ADC is the only Tuareg movement officially recognized by the Malian government, reconstituting the ADC symbolizes an important step toward returning to the Algiers Accords framework.

5.(C) Coaxing dissident Tuareg rebel leaders like Bahanga and Fagaga to return to the ADC under the leadership of ag Bibi may prove difficult. Several months of skirmishes with the Malian military have given Bahanga a certain amount of independence from traditional Tuareg power structures. In the eyes of many Kidal Tuaregs, however, Bahanga remains a semi-literate bandit incapable of leading anyone other than members of his own Ifergoumessen Tuareg faction.

6.(C) The ADC contingent of the Tuareg delegation is equally uninspiring. Commandant ag Massamad and Kidal Chamber of Commerce president ag Assalat are peripheral members of the ADC who belong to the smaller Taghat Melet fraction, which limits their ability to speak on behalf of other Tuaregs. Ag Sidamou occupies a more central place within the ADC but his

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conflicting roles as the National Assembly Deputy from Tessalit, a leader of the Idnane fraction and a renowned illicit trafficker mean he is ill-suited for the role of Tuareg point person. While ADC spokesman ag Bibi belongs to the Kidal Tuareg's ruling Ifoghas hierarchy, he is increasingly out of the loop when it comes to ADC operational decisions. Yet he does hold one trump card: his signature is affixed to the Algiers Accords.

Red Cross Identifies 75 Malian Hostages

7.(U) Last week the Malian Red Cross in Kidal visited 33 Malian soldiers held hostage by Bahanga. The Red Cross said the hostages were "not happy" but that their living conditions were consistent with the quality of life generally found in northern Mali. Three of the hostages were slightly ill. During the Red Cross visit, each of the Malian prisoners was allowed to call his family via cell phone. Tuareg rebels aligned with Bahanga produced a second group of 15 to 16 hostages just as the Red Cross was leaving to return to Kidal, bringing the total number of hostages held by Bahanga to 49. On June 14 the Red Cross visited 26 Malian soldiers captured by the ADC during the May 21 attack in Abeibera. The Red Cross reported that one of these prisoners, a Commandant Traore, required medication for diabetes.

Internally Displaced Populations and Food Shortages

8.(U) The Malian Red Cross, in conjunction with the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), is completing an assessment of food availability in the region of Kidal. Officials with the Red Cross in Kidal report that the impacts of food shortages are already visible among the several thousand people displaced by fighting in the region. Malian government officials and members of civil society in Kidal also expressed fears of an impending food crisis to a locally employed Embassy staff member who is from Kidal and visited the city June 10-12. Approximately 70 to 80 percent

of Kidal's inhabitants have left the town. People have also fled the villages of Abeibera and Aguelhok. Malian military check-points and the presence of Tuareg rebel groups have reduced the number of commercial resupply trucks carrying food, medicines and other essential items to Kidal to close to zero. Local leaders described the town as under a de facto embargo. The Governor of Kidal, Alhamdou ag Illyene, said the food situation in Kidal was dire and that without increased assistance people may begin to die of hunger within months. He said the Malian government had pledged to deliver a certain quantity of millet but had been unable to transport the supplies all the way to Kidal. The Mayor of Kidal said he expected to see child deaths from starvation within weeks.

Comment: More Pressure on Bahanga

9.(C) Since the ADC is the only Tuareg rebel faction officially recognized by the Malian government, Tuareg leaders and Algerian mediators will likely pressure Bahanga to re-align himself with the ADC in order to facilitate a return to the Algiers Accords framework. Bahanga has repeatedly called for the implementation of the Algiers Accords. Reassuming a place within the ADC that is subservient to ADC spokesperson Ahmada ag Bibi, however, is likely not what Bahanga had in mind. It will be incumbent on Algeria to find a way to convince Bahanga to return to the fold, possibly by facilitating the return of Iyad ag Ghali from Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation around Kidal is growing increasingly worrisome. The areas where most of the displaced populations have taken refuge in northern Mali are difficult to access even in times of peace. Continuing hostilities make assessing their needs extremely difficult and delivering any relief, should relief be required, close to impossible.
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